

The Unpublished Leskernick Diaries— catalogue

Mike SEAGER THOMAS (09/10/24)

Introduction

Between 1995 and 1999, the UCL Institute of Archaeology Bronze Age Landscapes of Bodmin Moor Project (known as the Leskernick Project) applied a range of techniques to the elucidation of the archaeology of, and the practice of archaeology on, the Prehistoric settlement and ritual complex of Leskernick Hill, Bodmin Moor. Techniques included conventional excavation, but with innovative context sheets, phenomenological (subjective, person-centred) survey, an art project, the writing of personal and excavation trench diaries, anthropological/sociological questionnaires and so-called participant observation, etc. (Bender, Hamilton and Tilley, 2007). Theoretically the Project was egalitarian, and *all* the participants were to have a say, both in the interpretation of the Leskernick site but also as subjects of study themselves.

The stated aim of the diaries was to reveal the "true" process of archaeological research (Basu, 1998a). Everybody was to write one, and these were to be shared. In practice, however, only

selected examples were circulated, while only those of the directors, and then only those written by them in 1996, were made publicly available in their entirety. The diaries were drawn upon freely, if selectively, for the project book, *Stone Worlds* (Bender, Hamilton and Tilley, 2007), and a handful of other publications (e.g. Bender, Hamilton and Tilley, 1997; Seager Thomas, 2014), but they have never themselves been the subject of a designated study and the potential they have as a resource for scholars interested in Leskernick and the sociology of archaeological fieldwork remains largely unrealised.

A number of reasons have been given for their neglect. Many were handwritten (true). The creator of the website on which they were to appear, was not given them (not true—on the website he describes reading at least one of them) (Basu, 1998a & b). The Project and the Project directors had no right to make them public (untrue, since all project members understood them to be an integral part of the Project and as such project property). It was also felt that comments in them might be libellous or cause hurt in some way (S. Hamilton, pers. comm.)(probably true). Whether it was also a deliberate act of disempowerment as has been implied by some commentators (Anderson and Krsmanovic, 2008, p. 35), however, is uncertain.

For the book, *Stone Worlds*, in which the present writer was originally rechristened "Alan", he argued that the views of *all* the diarists be properly attributed and for all but one chapter (12) and a handful of probably accidental omissions won. But he nonetheless remains suspicious of the motivations of those of his colleagues who in person and in their diaries made no attempt to hide their partiality.

While everybody was encouraged to write a diary, it was not compulsory, and many did not, or did not every year. It is unknown therefore how many were written. Of those that were, however, 60 survive, wholly or in part, and scans of all but two of these have now been uploaded onto the *Internet Archive*.¹ Their usefulness varies. Inevitably a lot of them were self-censored. Some are perfunctory. The writers of these clearly had no commitment to this aspect of the project. Others are incomplete—for example, the single first-hand description by an *excavator* of the burial of a book in the backfill of one of the excavation trenches (Wilmore, 2007, p. 273–5) appears carefully to have been torn out. Others are difficult to read, because they were written using 6H pencils, a favourite of the archaeologist, or because they were rained on or smeared with mud.... and so on.

¹¹ https://archive.org/details/@haggis_the_cat?query=leskernick

Nonetheless, the diaries remain an invaluable resource.

They share many features in common with everyday personal diaries. Project members used them to work through ideas, as mnemonics, as an escape, cathartically, and to show themselves off to posterity (cf. Lejeune, 2009, pp. 31, 34). Because it was expected from the outset that they would be shared with other members of the Project, they also became a way of messaging these: ingratiatingly, supportively, insultingly. Yes, guys—we got the message. Above all, though, the same things were described differently by different participants, which enables us to consider these more objectively than we would had they come to us from a single source only. In the book *Stone Worlds* the view we had of the Project was mediated exclusively through its directors and a handful of others; now, with the publication of these diaries, a clearer overview of the Project as a whole is possible.

To what extent was the stated aim of the diaries realized? Not much. But they do provide an insight into the project dynamic, showing how a "cross section of society united by a common interest" (as one diary writer put it) operated and coped in a harsh physical and philosophically antagonistic environment.

Obvious study themes, which might be informed by the diaries, include:

- Diary practice (diary writing on site and how to make this more effective)
- Theory and practice in the Project (e.g. the Project's egalitarian pretences versus the clear evidence in the diaries for a project hierarchy in practice and interpretation)
- Varying perceptions of the moor, the Project, the project members
- Project politics, social organisation and participant dynamics/relationships. etc.

Remaining parts of the Project archive scheduled for upload onto the *Internet Archive* include the excavation context sheets and excavation summaries (which the trench diaries were intended to compliment), selected, previously unpublished photographs of these excavations, and several partial/draft chapters from the second (unpublished) project book *Excavating Stone Worlds*, in which extended descriptions of the excavated data from the site were used in an exploration of (then) current understandings of the British Bronze Age.

The whereabouts of the phenomenological survey archive are not known.

References

- ANDERSON, W. AND KRSMANOVIC, D. (2008) "Critiquing the archaeological diary", *P.I.T. archeologische ervaringen*, 6, pp. 29–40.
- BASU, P. (1998a) "Introductory note", "Leskernick Project Diaries", *Leskernick* [online], <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/leskernick/diaries.html>
- BASU, P. (1998b) "Diaries", "Leskernick Project Forum", *Leskernick* [online], <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/leskernick/forum/forum04.html>
- BENDER, B., HAMILTON, S. and TILLEY, C. (1997) "Leskernick: stone worlds, alternative narratives, nested landscapes", *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 63, pp. 147–78.
- BENDER, B., HAMILTON, S. and TILLEY, C. (2007) *Stone Worlds. Narrative and Reflexivity in Landscape Archaeology*. Left Coast Press: Walnut Creek, CA.
- LEJEUNE, P. (2009) *On Diary*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii.
- SEAGER THOMAS, M. (2014) "Excavating on the Moor", *Artefact Services Research Papers*, 1.
- WILMORE, M. (2007). "The book and the Trowel", in Bender, B., Hamilton, S. and Tilley, C. *Stone Worlds. Narrative and Reflexivity in Landscape Archaeology*, pp. 244–76. Left Coast Press: Walnut Creek, CA.

Diary Catalogue

Personal Diaries

1995

1. Sue Hamilton, project co-director
2. Chris Tilley, project co-director

1996

3. Anna Adsetts, surveyor
- Unnumbered. Barbara Bender, project co-director. Available on the project website:
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/leskernick/diaries/diary96.html>
4. Wayne Bennett, surveyor
5. Henry Broughton, surveyor
6. Andrew C or L [partial diary]
7. Jo Franks, excavator
8. Sue Hamilton, project co-director. Also available on the project website:
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/leskernick/diaries/diary96.html>
10. Matt Lake, surveyor and excavator
11. Ash Rennie, excavation site planner
12. Ash Rennie, excavation site planner; Mike Seager Thomas, excavation site planner & excavation supervisor (hut 23); Helen Wickstead, excavation supervisor (stone row terminal) [joint "Caravan" diary]
13. Gary Robinson, excavator
14. Jane Russell, excavation site planner and illustrator

15. Christel Sjöström, surveyor
16. Charlie Smith, excavator
17. Chris Tilley, project co-director. Available on the project website:
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/leskernick/diaries/diary96.html>
18. Marylyn Whaymand, surveyor and excavator

1997

19. Ceri Ashley, excavator
20. Barbara Bender, project co-director
21. Wayne Bennett, surveyor
22. Henry Broughton, surveyor
23. Angus Graham, excavator
24. Sue Hamilton, project co-director
25. Sue Hamilton, project co-director (1996–97 original unedited manuscript)
9. Penni Harvey Piper, excavator
26. Dave Hooley, visiting curator
27. Eric Jones, excavation supervisor
28. Dan King, excavator
29. Lesley O'Rourke, excavator
30. Stuart Randal, excavator
31. Jane Russell, excavation site planner and illustrator
32. Justin Russell, excavation site planner;
Mike Seager Thomas, excavation supervisor
(house 39 and hut 23) [joint "Caravan" diary]
33. Fay Stevens, excavator
34. Steve Townend, excavator

35. Mike Wilmore, sociologist

1998

36. Sharon Adnit, excavation site planner

37. Anonymous, excavator

38. Nicholas Beaudry, excavation supervisor
(Field Feature 1)

39. Barbara Bender, project co-director

40. Dan King, excavator

41. Cliff Sampson, excavator

42. Lesley Smith, photographer & excavator

43. Jeremy Stafford-Deitsch, photographer
[poem]

44. Fay Stevens, photographer [photographic
diary] (referred to in diary 52 but missing)

1999

45. Anonymous, excavator

46. Marion Cutting, excavator

47. Sue Hamilton, project co-director

48. Connor McCauly, excavator

49. Tessa Moray, excavator

50. Ranjana Pieris, excavator

51. Katie Rose, excavator

52. Fay Stevens, photographer [photographic
diary]

Trench Diaries

53. Hut 23, 1996–97

54. House 39, 1996-97

55. Stone Row Terminal, 1996

- 56. Cairn 5, 1997
- 57. Field Feature, 1998
- 58. North Stone Circle, 1998
- 59. House 39, 1999
- 60. Settlement Enclosure Wall sections, 1999

